



## Mercury Switches

### Potential Environmental Impacts

When mercury switches from certain hood and trunk lighting assemblies are not removed prior to compacting or shredding, mercury is released into the environment. Mercury is highly toxic to humans and the environment. It accumulates in the tissues of fish and other organisms in mercury-contaminated water and may be carried up the food chain to humans. Removal and proper management of the mercury switches in vehicles destined for salvage is an important part of keeping mercury out of the environment.



**Mercury switches removed from vehicle light assemblies**

### Legal Requirements

- ♦ Mercury switches that are removed from a vehicle are hazardous waste and must be managed and disposed properly. See Appendix A for more information on the management of hazardous wastes.

### Where are mercury switches located in a vehicle?



**Hood light fixture with mercury switch assembly**

Vehicle trunk and hood light switches can contain mercury. A mercury switch is probably being used if the light goes on when the hood is partway up, or you can see that the bulb housing is deliberately mounted at an angle to the hood. Most cars containing mercury switches are American makes and models. For information on the known makes and model of vehicles that contain mercury switches, call the Office of Pollution Prevention at (860) 424-3297.

In addition to the mercury switches in convenience lighting, some relays may contain mercury switches to activate airbags, anti-lock brakes (primarily found in four-wheel drive vehicles), some seat belt systems, and some automatically adjusting suspension systems. Some agricultural equipment, military vehicles, mass transit vehicles, and fire hook and ladder equipment also contain mercury switches.

## How are the switches removed in dismantling operations?

- ♦ Cut the power supply wire attached to the base of the switch assembly.
- ♦ Remove any fasteners in order to separate the entire assembly from the vehicle.
- ♦ Carefully remove the mercury switch from the assembly. If the switch cannot easily be removed, put the entire assembly in the collection container. Removing the switch from the assembly will save storage space and may also save on disposal costs.
- ♦ If the switch or the assembly looks damaged or corroded, place the switch or entire assembly in a separate plastic container, like a yogurt tub with a tight fitting lid, to prevent leakage.
- ♦ For additional information on how to locate and remove switches from specific makes and models, call the DEP- Office of Pollution Prevention at (860) 424-3297.

## Best Management Practices

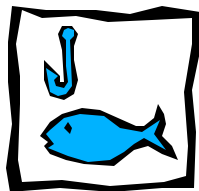
- ★ Remove the mercury switches before the vehicle is junked or crushed. This can be done at the same time as removal of vehicle fluids, batteries, refrigerants and non-deployed airbags.
- ★ Do not place the switches in tin or aluminum containers because mercury may combine with these metals and leak through the seams.
- ★ The switches are very small and easy to inadvertently put in clothes pockets and end up in the trash or wash. Educate your staff so that they understand switches are hazardous waste and should be placed in the collection container immediately after removal.



Proper storage of mercury switches

## Pollution Prevention Checklist

- ✓ Do you remove mercury switches from vehicles before they are junked or crushed?
- YES      NO      N/A



### Did You Know?

One gram of mercury, the amount contained in one switch, can pollute the aquatic life of a one-acre lake.

### 2004 Pit Stops Fact Sheets

Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, 79 Elm Street, Hartford, CT 06106-5127  
Office of Pollution Prevention (860) 424-3297 [www.dep.state.ct.us/wst/p2/vehicle/abindex.htm](http://www.dep.state.ct.us/wst/p2/vehicle/abindex.htm)  
Fact Sheet: DEP-P2-PITSTOPS-FS-005

Last Updated: August, 2004